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ABSTRACT

Television viewing by children is a major concern of parents, legislators, and educators in the United States today. By high school graduation a young person will have watched 15,000 hours of television as compared to 11,000 to 12,000 hours spent in school. Concerned groups fear a loss of reading ability, the development of a consumer mentality, and passive development. An alliance between the home and the school is a promising means of confronting the problem. This document provides curriculum plans utilized by schools in Oregon, Idaho, and New York to teach critical skills needed to analyze the content of television programming and provide classroom experiences in analyzing television commercials. The classroom studies of television news programming prepare students for their roles as citizens by developing the ability to distinguish between objective and subjective reporting. Entertainment programs are used for language skill development and social analysis. A 21-item bibliography is included. (NL)

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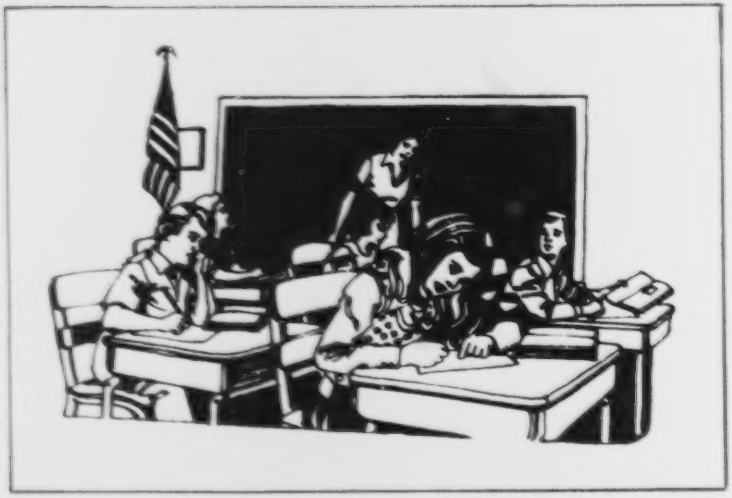
CHILDREN AND TELEVISION



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CHILDREN AND TELEVISION

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FOREWORD

All the available statistics confirm the pervasive role that television plays in the United States, if not throughout the world. More people are exposed to television than any other single mode of mass communication. By the time a child graduates from high school, s/he will have spent more than 15,000 hours watching television as compared to 11,000 to 12,000 hours in school. Before children reach eighteen, they will have seen approximately 350,000 commercials urging them to "want, want, want." Clearly television is an important influence in the lives of our children and youths.

The author of this paper discusses the information and the skills young people need to deal critically with the content of television programming and makes a case for incorporating these into the social studies methods classes and the school curriculum.

Arthur Clubok, Editor

CHILDREN AND TELEVISION:
A BASIC CONCERN IN SOCIAL SCIENCE EDUCATION

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The old saw, "Everyone complains about the weather but no one does anything about it" should strike a familiar note in the minds of the many teachers and parents who have complained so long about the negative effects that television has upon the education of the young in our nation. Since the late 1940's when television began its amazing penetration of the fabric of American life, there have been recurring calls by legislators, child advocacy groups, and educators for some sort of control over this medium in order to moderate the harmful effects that its programs may have upon the young people.

Among the continuing concerns which have been voiced by teachers and parents alike are the following:

1. Television draws young people away from reading as a leisure activity thus eliminating opportunities for reinforcing the skills taught by the schools; scores in reading will suffer.

2. Television interferes with the home study assignments that children should be expected to do, diminishing the quality of education that the school is attempting to provide.

3. Television viewing occupies so much of the typical child's time in the evening that the child arrives at school tired and unenthusiastic for the work at hand.

4. Television occupies so much of the child's time that other developmental experiences are missed, the child becomes a passive participant in life's dramas.

5. Television commercials stimulate almost infinite desires for products that are often unnecessary or harmful to the child's nutritional regimen.

6. The use of violence and sexual content to attract and hold attention of young viewers provides an inaccurate picture of life to the naive child. Content which emphasizes sexuality often deals with social and moral values in an incomplete fashion, failing to inform the viewer that the behavior is not typical.

It is not the intention here to rehash the old quarrels which so many Americans have had with television, quarrels which seemed like lovers' quarrels if the extent of television viewing is any measure of the distaste which adults have for the medium. Television has been so thoroughly and quickly embraced by the American people that the question referring to presence of a television set in the household was dropped from the census questionnaire after 1970 when it was learned that more than 90 percent of all American households had at least one operating television set.

It seems appropriate, although possibly annoying, to wonder why it is that American adults have been so taken in by a medium which, it is often alleged, poses so much danger to the educational and moral development of the young. Certainly, any response which the school may attempt to make to the inroads of television in the lives of the nation's youth must take into account the larger social environment in which the child encounters television. As social science educators consider the preparation of teachers with the skills and concepts that are relevant to the education of children in the age of television, it seems reasonable to begin with an understanding of the larger social context of the topic and

to move then to identify the nature of the interface between the children's experiences with television and the educational agendas of the school.

At the very outset, it is important that teachers recognize the part that the family plays in the education of the child and no where is the family more involved than in those situations where television viewing and home study compete for the child's time. A viable family-school alliance appears to offer the most promising support to children as they deal with television in their lives.

Since 1968, the writer has worked on pro-active approaches to the problems of television, children and social education, because it appears that in most instances, people are either the controllers or willing victims of whatever negative effects television has on either adults or children. If the social science educators have a role to play in this unfolding socio-technological drama, it seems that it should include attempts to assist young people to more fully understand the uses that they make of television in their lives. Young people should be assisted to gain both the information and the skills that will enable them to deal critically with the content of television programming. Such an orientation is consistent with social education in a democracy that continues to call upon its citizens to struggle with the big problems of freedom of information, censorship, social values, and decision making.

In the remaining sections of this paper there will be presented examples of curriculum plans that have been incorporated into social studies and language arts programs in schools in Oregon, Idaho, and New York. (Some of the earliest pilot work was carried out in the Middle School in Belpre, Ohio, in 1970-72.) These curriculum examples will serve to provide a background for some of the suggestions that will be offered with regard to dealing with television and critical viewing skills as a component of the social studies methods courses for prospective teachers.

Objectives of Curriculum Elements

The germinal curriculum development that was begun in 1970 was guided by these specific objectives:

1. To raise the levels of understanding about the nature and uses of television in the United States.

2. To provide the young person with analytical tools that will be useful in the evaluation of the content of entertainment programming, so that the young viewer will be increasingly sensitive to those uses of violence and explicit sex which contribute little or nothing to the development of a plot, to the reasonable resolution of a problem, or to the esthetic quality of a program.

3. To provide youngsters with concepts and skills that enable them to analyze the persuasive messages of commercials; to discriminate between product appeals and affective appeals, and to become sensitive to the subtle persuaders. We recognize that this may have more to do with the youngsters as a consumer of hard goods than with violence, but awareness and sensitivity may be transferable.

4. To provide youngsters with concepts that will enable them to use television news with understanding of its limitations, to understand that television news cannot offer the referrability, the depth, or the scope of print news. The young viewer will see considerable violence and conflict in television news; the peaceful, harmonious aspects of the news do not offer the action, excitement, and entertainment that popular television news seems to demand.

5. To provide youngsters with the opportunity to learn about their own personal uses of tele-

vision; what they like and dislike, how much they watch, when they watch, and why they watch. Television self-awareness with youngsters aged ten and above is an attainable goal.

6. To prepare young viewers to identify the value conflicts that are imbedded in much entertainment program content, and to provide experiences in value clarification and the consideration of reasonable alternatives to the problem solutions presented in television programs.

Within the scope of the social studies methods course, it seems reasonable for prospective teachers to examine and analyze these objectives and to consider how they may logically become part of the learning experiences of children. It is important to take into account the educational levels of pupils at this point since exposure to certain types of television program content does not mean that the child is ready to deal with its implications.

An excellent project for students in the social studies methods course involves the selection of television program content that would be useful in working with various age levels in pursuit of the objectives cited here.

Five major skill areas which have served to guide and organize critical viewing skills activities in the social studies class are presented here. (They will be reflected in the instructional examples which appear later.)

1. Comprehending the Messages

   Grasping the meaning of the message
   Comprehending images discriminately
   Comprehending language discriminately
   Interpreting "hidden" meanings
   Specifying the working element of the message
   Understanding to whom the message is directed
   Interpreting the intent of the message

2. Perceiving the Elements of the Message

Noting details of the message
Noting sequence of the elements
Perceiving relationship of elements
Identifying character traits
Noting integration of aural and visual elements

3. Evaluating the Message

Assignment of credibility to statements
Identifying fact, opinion, imaginative writing and images
Identify affective appeals
Evaluating logic, reasoning, and "montaged" relationships

4. Reacting to the Message Personally

Recognizing intended affective reactions and motives
Relegating personal value (utility) to the message
Identifying emotional satisfactions and their sources
Relating other experiences to message
Drawing conclusions, inferences, or predictions

5. Comprehending the Impact of Medium

Understanding the role of television in one's life and impact of this role of message
Understanding impact of television qua institution on message

Experiences with Television Commercials

Many of the skills which were listed in the preceding section are brought into focus when pupils are involved in the study of commercials. Although the obvious social studies implication seems to be economic education-consumer

education, it is important to note that many political campaigns use the same persuasive techniques that are used to sell soap, deodorant, and breakfast cereal. There is a dimension of political socialization that may be addressed through the study of television commercials.

Analyzing commercials and, finally, producing commercials in the classroom are activities that are appealing to pupils as early as third grade and can be integrated with more complexity in high school classes. For purposes of the college level course in social studies methods, it is recommended that the students work through a specific activity and then modify it to suit various grade levels. Such an activity may proceed as follows:

1. Selection and analysis of three or four popular commercials to identify the selling techniques used.

   -Product Qualities. One classification of advertisements includes those which demonstrate the qualities of the product. Positive product qualities are displayed. Rarely are negative attributes mentioned, and if they are, it it usually to convince the buyer that the advertiser is honest.

   -Problem-Solution. When the need for a particular service or product is not well-established, advertisements will approach the selling situation in two steps: The first will establish a problem or need; in the second step the product will be shown as the solution.

   -Slice of Life. A variant of the problem solution approach is "Slice of Life." Slice of life dramatizes a common problem situation and presents the product as a solution.

   -Association. Association commericals attempts to establish a desirable mood in which the product is seen as a necessary part. The product may be associated with femininity, masculinity, love, good times, whatever.

-Identification. An extension of association is the identification approach. A common technique will make use of a person established in the public eyes as the spokesperson for products that may be unrelated to the competence of the person.

-Competence. There are instances where persons competent in a field will endorse products related to that field.

-Price. The last in this list of selling appeals is price. Reduce the price sufficiently and any product will sell. For some people, a bargain is irresistible regardless of product quality.

-Combinations. Many commercials are obviously combinations of these techniques. Price can combine with any element; association and identification are often used together.

2. Evaluation of each commercial by following five basic steps.

-Identify what is promised explicitly and implicitly in both the audio and visual portions of the message. Toothpaste ads explicitly promise white teeth and clean breath and implicitly promise that the user will be attractive to the opposite sex.

-Identifying the criteria by which the performance is to be evaluated. Criteria for evaluation can come from two sources: the commercials themselves and from the buyers.

-Determine whether the criteria are appropriate to the product or service. Basically, this step investigates whether or not the effects or results that we seek from a product or service are reasonable expectations.

-Determine the likelihood of success of the product or service as a solution to the need problem. This determination requires one to examine the product or service for the qualitites that it can provide.

-Establish the value of the performance of the product or service in terms of the individual. Value increases as the need of the individual increases and as the number alternative solutions decreases.

3. Produce a commercial on videotape using given techniques, keeping within the usual thirty second time limits for commercial television.

4. Select the instructional objectives that would be appropriate for the grade level you plan to teach from the following:

-Identify how a television commercial differs from an entertainment program.

-Identify the main purpose of a commerical as one of selling something.

-Demonstrate an understanding of the fact that people use television commercials to make decisions to buy products and services.

-Identify explicit and implicit promises that may be contained in audio and visual content of a television commercial.

-Identify appropriate means to evaluate the performance of a product and to determine the validity of the advertised promises.

-Differentiate among verbal, nonverbal, and visual content of a television commercial and to explain the intended effects of each in a specific commercial.

-Provide examples of TV commercials that respond to some individual needs.

-Recognize specific persuasive techniques that appear in selected commercials.

-Identify different types of commercial messages in terms of their purposes (e.g., selling products and services, good will, images building, public service, promotions of programs).

-Describe ideal target audiences for specific commercials.

-Demonstrate an ability to explain production decisions by participation in the preparation of a commercial.

-Explain the place of television commercials in our current mercantile system and in the competitive, free enterprise economy of the United States.

Studying Television News Programs

The often misused "Current Events" aspect of social studies program has evolved, with television, into an important part of the effort to prepare young people to use public information in a careful and selective manner as they anticipate their responsibilities as citizens. The objectives that are appropriate to incorporating the study of TV news are presented here.

1. The student will be able to describe the differences that exist among the information programs: news, talk shows, documentaries, and editorials.

2. The student will be able to identify local news shows and network news shows on the basis of their content.

3. The student will be able to identify advantages and limitations of TV news in comparison with news presented in other media.

4. The student will demonstrate knowledge of the process by which TV news is gathered, edited and presented.

5. The student will understand the organization of the local television station with emphasis on the work of the news department.

6. The student will be able to describe the various sources that contribute to the content of the TV news program.

7. The student will participate in the process of the production of a news program.

The following material is taken from a curriculum guide which was prepared by a working group of teachers in the East Syracuse, New York school district. Students in social studies methods classes will become acquainted with instructional considerations of this component by actually working through the activity themselves and then making adaptations for various grade levels.

Generalization: I. The uniqueness of TV news offers a montage of action, excitement and entertainment which the one dimensional printed news can not offer, yet "TV news can not offer the referability, the depth, or the scope of print news."

OBJECTIVES	ACTIVITIES
1. Students will be able to distinguish between local, national and international news.	1. Given specific news clips, the students will be asked to categorize them.

OBJECTIVES	ACTIVITIES
2. Students will analyze the TV news program as to the priorities given to news items.	2. Given actual newscast, students will determine the importance of each news item based on the time allotted and, positioning in the newscast stories stressed in the pre-news blurbs. (a) list stories in order of presentation (b) time each news story
3. Students will compare and contrast the newscasts of three major networks for the content, selection and emphasis of the days news.	3. (a) Given video-tape of the 3 major newscasts, students will list news items in order or presentation, time allotted to each and state emphasis of each story. (b) Given the same story as covered by 3 major networks, students will compare and contrast in terms of time allotted, information stressed, and subjective emphasis.
4. Students will be able to distinguish between objective and subjective news reporting.	4. Given videotape of a news story, students will be able to recognize the subjective (editional) emphasis and content.

OBJECTIVES	ACTIVITIES
5. (a) Students will establish their own criterion for local, state, national and international news. (b) Students will analyze the TV news in comparison to their own criteria.	5. (a) Students will list and rank in terms of the importance the kind of information they think is most important for the general public to be aware of on the local, state, national and international levels. (b) Students will categorize and rank each story on the nightly news and compare the emphasis to their own list.
6. Students will compare the TV news to newspapers, magazines, in terms of content, depth, emphasis and objectivity.	6. (a) Students will list news items in terms of their importance on the front page of the local newspaper (and on NY Times, etc.) and the nightly news and discuss the differences. (b) Students will analyze the content and stress of a story on the TV news with the same story in the newspaper and discuss the differences.

OBJECTIVES	ACTIVITIES
7. Students will become aware of the process of news gathering on a local, state, national and international level.	7. Students will take a trip to TV stations to become aware of how the news is prepared. Resource people from TV stations will come to talk to kids about how the news is prepared. Kids will produce a program of school news on videotape.

Studying TV Entertainment Programs

The study of entertainment programs involves a high level of integration of language skill development with the skills of social analysis appropriate to the study of plots, characters, motivations, social statements, and sensitivity to aspects of fantasy and reality in most drama. A few selected objectives are presented here to illustrate the interdisciplinary nature of instruction in this area.

1. Describe the plot of a TV program in terms of the interaction among story line, setting, characterization, and the motivating elements.

2. Describe the kinds of characters needed to develop a given story line.

3. Identify the major and minor characters in a program and explain the value of each character to the plot development.

4. Identify and describe the major types of TV entertainment programs.

5. Explain the difference between characters and actors in a dramatic presentation.

6. Identify and describe the conflicts and problems that are typically used in favorite programs.

7. Identify the conflict in the program and explain its necessity to the plot.

8. Identify the strongly held values of major characters as expressed in their actions and in the resolution of conflict and problems.

9. Evaluate the information presented in entertainment programs in terms of its utility to different settings in real life.

10. Classify the conflict or problem that is used in a specific program (man against nature, man against fate).

The following material was taken again from the work of the East Syracuse, New York teacher group. It provides examples of teaching plans used to pursue specific objectives. The college social studies methods students will find it most beneficial to work through this example as though they were the pupils and then to adapt to various age levels.

Outline for Comparing Situation Comedies

Characterization

1. Which shows have a strong focus on one main character?
   ex: authority figure, leader, hero
2. What are the outstanding traits of the main character?
3. Which main character is most believeable? Why? With whom do you identify or sympathize the most? Why?
4. Are any main characters stereotypes? Are they unique? Explain.

5. Is any main character more important than the plot? (his actions, dialogue)
6. How do the characters on each show interact? In which shows, if any, do the supporting characters get a role equal to or more important than that of the main character?
7. Which shows depend on the same cast of characters each week? Which shows introduce many new characters each week?

Conflict, Plot Development

1. At what point in the shows are the conflicts revealed? How is this done in each show?
2. How believeable are the conflicts? Are they trivial or important? Are the conflicts something you might be involved with in real life or are they artifically constructed for the sake of the show and characters?
3. Are there any sub-plots? Which show has the greatest number? Are these sub-plots necessary to develop the main conflict?
4. What do the sub-plots add to the comedy of the show?

Resolutions

1. Are any of the shows predictable? Do you have a strong hint from the beginning as to what the resolution will be?
2. Which of the shows have mini-climaxes? Why? In which shows were you more aware of them?
3. In which shows are the resolutions convenient endings? Do they follow naturally from the plot or are they contrived?

Humor

1. Would any of the plots be strong (or well-developed) enough to work in formats other than comedy?

2. What types of humor are used in these shows? Which shows depend on the situation for humor - more on language (puns, sarcasm, understatement, etc.) Which are more dependent on slap-stick or physical humor? Which are more dependent on facial expressions?
3. Which shows, if any, use laugh tracks? Are these laugh tracks effective or offensive?
4. Is the humor in these shows strong enough to stand without a laugh track?

Integrating New Content Into the Social Studies Curriculum

Much has been written about correlation, fusion, and integration of interdisciplinary topics of study, yet the new teacher is often perplexed when she is confronted with the task of dealing with this on her own. Accordingly, it may be helpful to devote some time in the social studies methods course to the process or integration of the concepts and skills of critical television viewing into social studies.

Integration provides for the inclusion of those concepts and skills from a "new" area which can be reasonably developed within the structure of the existing curriculum, in this instance, social studies. There is an obvious interface between the concepts and skills of critical television viewing and the long standing objectives of the social studies.

Consider the manner in which television programs have dealt with themes involving these social concepts:

culture	change	ethnocentrism
norms	roles	values
power	loyalty	interdependence

"All in the Family," "Different Strokes," "Three's Company," "To Sidney With Love," "One Day at a Time," and Momma's Family" have dealt with social controversial topics such as prostitution, abortion, homosexuality, racial prejudice, and divergent life styles, to cite but a few. Television as a socializing agent probes into many of the same

areas as does the social studies curriculum but with the apparent aim being entertainment rather than instructive.

With regard to the skills of inquiry that are so essential to critical television viewing, the use of the four question categories to guide inquiry in social studies cited by Massialas seems relevant. It will be useful for prospective teachers to consider the value of these questions for social studies generally as well as for critical viewing skills activities.

1. Questions that call for expository responses. Where is Uganda?

2. Questions calling for definition and clarification. What does democratic citizenship mean?

3. Questions calling for hypothesis. Does violence on television lead to more violent behavior in children?

4. Questions calling for grounding. Why did the Democrats select Mrs. Ferraro as their Vice President candidate for 1984?

Problem identification and description, hypothesizing, developing questions to guide inquiry, searching for and using relevant information, and formulating tentative conclusions and generalizations are essential elements in the inquiry process in social studies. Activities in critical television viewing make use of the same inquiry processes and can be integrated into social studies without diluting the conventional curriculum. The five steps suggested earlier for use in analyzing television commercials certainly provide appropriate application of the last three parts of the inquiry process presented here.

Conclusion

A carefully selected bibliography is included here

for the professors and students who would like to pursue the topic of "Television and Social Science Education" as a major group project. Of course, such a project would be greatly enhanced if the instructors of language arts methods and their students were to join in the activity.

Although television has been a major concern of educators and citizens generally for three decades, it appears that the incorporation of TV viewing skills and concepts into the school's programs of instruction will be at a slow pace. Established curriculum areas do not yield to change, especially with respect to time honored content and the security of textbooks and lesson plans that are comfortable, albeit shopworn.

Integration makes sense to the writers but time and experience may inform us that every new infant needs a special set of parents. Social studies may be one of the partners.

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